Title: Boundary-making in the Netherlands. An example with majority members and members of the Moroccan minority.

Abstract

The Netherlands are the home of people with various ethnic backgrounds, such as Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish or Moroccan (Schalk-Soekar, Van de Vijver, Hoogsteder, 2004). A hierarchy exists between those groups with inhabitants with Moroccan background being perceived as most different from the Dutch majority (Schalk-Soekar, Van de Vijver & Hoogsteder, 2004). Additionally, Dutch people seem to have a rather negative perception of this group (Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis & Otten, 2009). The situation of Moroccans in the Netherlands has been investigated in the last view years with the means of quantitative analysis and mainly in the light of the acculturation framework studies using ethnic group as self-evident variable (eg. Andriessen & Phalet, 2010; Baerveldt et al., 2004; Kalmijn & van Tubergen, 2006; Phalet & Schönflug, 2001; Stevens et al., 2004; Stevens et al., 2007; van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998).

Instead of assuming ethnic group as an explanans this research follows the boundary-making approach by Wimmer (2007; 2008; 2009) focusing on the group construction process itself. This approach stipulates that boundaries between ethnic groups are the result of social processes of closure and distancing along markers perceived as relevant by the groups between which the boundary is erected rather than a phenomenon occurring naturally in the world.

In order to explore these processes and markers semi-structured interviews with 15 Dutch people as well as 14 Dutch people with Moroccan background were conducted during September and October 2012. The mean age of the participants was 31.5 years ranging between 15 and 60. The data was analyzed using Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The results show that the markers used for boundary-construction are religion, habitus and language. Religion i.e. Islam, the most salient marker, plays an especially important role regarding partner choice and is often used in connection to a discussion of not belonging to the majority culture. Being Muslim as well as different norms and values are perceived as reason for a different way of acting in everyday life making habitus an important boundary marker. Regarding the third marker, language, a three-generation pattern can be found with the first generation being better at Berber or Arabic, the second generation being balanced bilinguals and the third generation being better at Dutch. Processes influencing the boundary-construction are the primarily negative discourse in the media and politics as well as negative personal experiences. However, time is associated with reducing boundaries under the condition that positive experiences with members of the other group are made.